

40 Days Together Devotional

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INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest truths in Scripture is what Jesus stated in Mark 3:24-25, “*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.*”²⁵ *If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*” Often times the church can be the opposite of that statement. Having many “parts” in the body, can also come with many thoughts and opinions. If we can learn to celebrate each other’s thoughts, ideas, and work through opinions, there can be victory. However, when disagreement enters, and if not responded to in a godly way, these moments can become detrimental to the direction of the church!

This devotional was written with the body of Christ (the church) in mind. The purpose of this book is to encourage you to take a personal challenge and walk for 40 days together with your church family, in devotion, prayer, fellowship and service. Unity should be the heartbeat of any congregation. With unity comes a healthy “Body”.

DAY ONE

Scripture Focus: Colossians 3:1-2 “*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*”

A new year always brings fresh perspective. It's as if God is allowing us to have a “do over”! It's not only to be seen as a “do-over” but also a spiritual makeover. Apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth that they are to become “*transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). In other words, it's time that we take our walk with Christ up a notch! As a church, we are to assist and help complement each other in our walk with Christ. Every family and individual that attends your church was placed there for a strategic reason. Each and every one of you have a Kingdom purpose, created for good works, and to do great things! The desire of every congregation is to see its members grow in the Lord, serve one another, be used effectively in their gifts and talents, worship in spirit and truth, and to adhere to a strong biblical worldview. Today, consider a few questions as you venture into “40 Days Together”. (In your journal write down and answer the following) 1. Why Do I Attend My Church? 2. What Is My Purpose as a Church Member? 3. What Is My Personal Mission? 4. What Are My Responsibilities in My Church?

These may be loaded questions, however, to move forward in the next 40 days together, we need to know what is the make-up of our church, as well as where we fit into the whole picture. We ask these questions not to put our leaders or our pastor in a corner, but to grasp a better understanding of the direction of your congregation, the focus of your church, and even greater, your biblical responsibility in the body of Christ. Remember, we are all in this together. Not one person holds the key to success, but only He who is the head of the church, who is Christ Jesus! How will you and/or your family assist your church in becoming better? What role will you play? What role(s) are you playing now, and how can you make it better? As you can see there is much to consider, much to pray about, but remember, we are all in this together for 40 days. The Lord will build His church, and we have the honor of seeing it done with our own eyes!

Prayer Focus: Pray for your pastor(s), leaders, and members of your church family. Pray for God's Holy Spirit to change your heart towards your church. Pray for a transforming 40 days together.

Focus Challenge: Make a commitment today to involve yourself (on a consistent basis) to a Bible study led by one of your church ministries (i.e.; Men's ministry, Women's ministry, Married couple's ministry, College ministry, Youth ministry, Small groups, etc.)

Study Focus: Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

DAY TWO

Scripture Focus: John 15:1-3 “*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.* ² *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.* ³ *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*”

Every first of the year brings hope, a new focus, and a clean slate. However, it's when we get deeper into the year that things begin to look a little cloudy. Life happens...and with life comes discouragements, disappointments, and a series of failures. The bad habits that we said we were going to overcome, once again become our biggest battle. Ever wonder why the blessings of the Lord are held from us? Because often times there may be too much flesh involved in what we say and do. Notice what Jesus says about Himself and His Father, “*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser*”. Jesus says that He is the “Vine” (that which gives life so it may grow), and that His Father is the “Vinedresser” (the One that cultivates the land). When the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are truly at work in us, they begin to change things about us that does not glorify Him. Verse two gives us detail as to how He does that, “*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit*”. The context of this verse is not talking about you losing your salvation, it is in fact saying that if there are areas in our lives that does not bear fruit or show growth, God “takes it away”. Why? Because it's hindering our maturity. Ask yourself this question and be sincere when answering it; “What areas in my life are NOT bearing fruit?” Notice what the Lord wants to do...He wants to take it away so that you can begin to bear fruit again! It's time to clean house! We must be willing to allow the Lord to take away anything that does not give Him glory—even if it hurts. God is always in the mood to make things better in us. Verse two goes on to say that “*He (God) prunes it so that it may bear more fruit*”. To prune, means to “clean”. Let God cleanse you and have His way. Notice verse three, “*You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*”. As believers we are clean because of the blood of Jesus. However, we need to be cleansed from our residue that we have left over. It's time we get back on track and allow the Holy Spirit to prune, take away, and clean anything and everything that does not please Him.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit begins to reveal areas in your life that need pruning, cleansing, and/or an absolute breaking.

Focus Challenge: Challenge yourself today to rid of things in your life that keep you from bearing fruit (i.e.; social media, bad relationships, unforgiveness, held grudges, etc.). Write them in your journal as the Holy Spirit reveals these areas to you.

Study Focus: Psalm 24:3-5; Psalm 51:1-7; James 4:8

DAY THREE

Scripture Focus: Matthew 6:33 “*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*”

There is something special that occurs when we seek the Lord first. Especially when we seek Him together as a church family! Seeking the Lord is a “Kingdom Principle”, because we are putting all other things to the side, and instead, placing Him in first place, as first priority, and in first position. When we make the Lord our first place, we are giving Him our mind, our heart, and our motive. When we make Him our first priority, we are placing Him before our job, education, ministry, and business. When we give Him our first position, we place Him before our family, spouse, children, and all other relationships. This is called a “Kingdom Principle”. The Lord has established in His word certain Kingdom principles, that come with a Kingdom promise, so that He may fulfill His Kingdom purpose.

Blessings from the Lord occur when we truly seek the Lord, and seek Him first! In these following Scriptures, notice the “principle”, the “promise”, and the

“purpose”. **Joshua 1:8** “*Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.*” *“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”*

Psalm 1:1-3 “*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!*” ² *But his delight is in the law of the Lord,*

And in His law he meditates day and night.” ³ *He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither;*

And in whatever he does, he prospers.” **James 1:25** “*But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”*

Let’s notice the ***principles*** given in all three verses. In Joshua and Psalms, we are encouraged to 1. Not let the scriptures depart from our mouths. 2. To delight in the word. 3. To meditate day and night on the word. In James, we see a similar principle; 1. Look intently into the scriptures. 2. To abide (study) in the scriptures.

Now let’s notice the ***promises*** given in all three verses when we apply the principles. In Joshua and Psalms, we see that, 1. Our way will be prosperous. 2.

We will be unmovable like a planted tree in water. 3. We will yield fruit. 4. We will not wither. In James we see the promise as being “blessed in whatever we do” when applying the principles.

The principles come with a promise! However, there is a ***purpose*** in the middle of it all. As we put all three books (Joshua, Psalms, James) and verses together, we see the following purpose; 1. Have success (meaning wisdom, insight, skill, and training in the scriptures). 2. Be a blessed man in the midst of a wicked generation. 3. Learn to be a doer and not just a hearer. The **Kingdom Principles** is to mediate on the word (day and night), study the word, and spend time knowing the Lord through His word, gaining knowledge in His word as you follow biblical principles for life. The **Kingdom Promises** given to us while we put Him first is success (spiritually), prosperity (in the knowledge of God’s word), and blessings in all that we do. Finally, the **Kingdom Purpose** is to make us better in Him as we place the Lord number one in our lives, so that in turn we will be unwavering, solid, focused and like a tree planted in water!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit give you a greater hunger and a deeper desire to get into the word day and night. And that you would learn what it truly means to put the Lord first in everything.

Focus Challenge: Your challenge is to put these verses in action by seeking the Lord day and night (in the morning before you start your day, and in the evening before you go to bed).

Study Focus: Psalms 37:4; Proverbs 3:5-6; Colossians 1:8

DAY FOUR

Scripture Focus: Matthew 6:19-21 “¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Everybody has their own agenda, their own plans, their own programs, personal goals they desire to accomplish, and ways they want to accomplish them. Here is another interesting point; God has an agenda too. His agenda is the advancement of His kingdom, His plan, His rule and His program. However, here is the question that often arises when it comes to the decision as to who’s plan and who’s agenda we will follow that day. We must ask ourselves as followers of Jesus, “Can I adequately define God’s kingdom and agenda”? This year, two words that we can adopt are: “Kingdom” and “Minded”. Can we learn to become “Kingdom minded”? To become Kingdom minded means that we are no longer “self-minded”. It’s changing the mindset as to how we do things and how we respond to those things which seem important to us. In Matthew 5, Jesus gives His famous sermon from the Mount of Beatitudes (Sermon on the Mount). It is in this sermon that He describes those who are “blessed” (poor in spirit, those who mourn, the gentle, etc.). Jesus describes a whole list of things that pleases the Father. Then in chapter 6 Jesus describes areas that are more personal to an individual. From verses 1-4, Jesus shares what it means to practice righteousness, how to give to the poor and to do it in such a way that people don’t see or notice. In verses 5-18, Jesus warns us not to pray like hypocrites, and to go into our closets to pray. When you fast, do so in a way where people don’t notice. To forgive, so God will forgive you, and when you pray, don’t pray in repetition, but with your heart and mind. In verses 19-24, Jesus warns to not store treasures on earth but in heaven. You can’t serve two masters- God and money. Finally, in verses 25-34, Jesus encourages us not to worry about what you will eat, drink and wear, because you are worth more than the birds of the air! You might ask what all this has to do with being Kingdom minded? You see, being self-minded, means that our personal agenda is in full effect. When we are self-minded, our concern rate goes through the roof! Our failures are more often than none. Our finances seem to be dwindling, slipping through purses with holes in them. Our future seems bleak, hopeless, with worry of tomorrow. When we are self-minded we age quicker, worry more, carry heavy loads on our shoulders, and lose sleep in the process; all this in turn leads to nothing! But when we are Kingdom minded, we then learn to put our absolute trust

in the Lord, His word, His promises, His power, and in His hands. Today, let us begin the process of learning what it means to be more Kingdom minded and less self-minded. Your spirit, soul, and mind will thank you for it!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit shows you what it means to give all your anxieties and burdens to Him, and to be less of you and more of Him.

Focus Challenge: Write down some areas of your life that have become burdens to you because you chose to hold on to them. In turn, release them to the Lord. Talk to someone [you trust] about this, confess it, so you may be healed!

Study Focus: Matthew 6:19-34; Psalms 37:4; Proverbs 3:5-6

DAY FIVE

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 “*Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* ² *In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.*”

Unfortunately, the reality of most congregations is that not everyone is connected to the Body. This is for two reasons: 1. By choice 2. They have been overlooked. According to church growth statistics, it's been recorded that 100% of the work in any given congregation is accomplished by 10% of its members. Which means that 90% of most church members play no significant role in the growth, vision, or direction of its church family. Today's church culture has made significant paradigm shifts. The mentality and loyalty of the church member in the 1970's to 1990's is no longer the mentality of today's church member. Today's church culture is mixed with those who have a loyalty to the Body of Christ and the direction of the church, with those who refuse to join the church, give to the church, or commit to the church. This is why in our congregations today we may see individuals and families attend for a season, only to never see them again. The Church of the Lord Jesus is in a unique season in history. Yet the Lord has great plans for His people. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “Am I in”? “Am I all in to His work, His purpose, and His direction for the church I am currently a member of?” If so, “What does it look like to be all in”? First, we must be all in in our relationship with the Lord. Often times this can be reversed. We can be all in with the church, but not completely in service to the Lord. When our goal is to honor God with our lives, service, and worship, the body of Christ in turn is blessed! Second, we must be all in in our relationship with God's people. One of the most difficult things to do is to accept people as they are...flaws and all! As long as there will be people, there will be troubles. However, it is when we are willing to love God and those He died for, that we begin to be all in! Finally, we must be all in to God's direction for His church. We must remember that the church does not belong to the one who stands behind the pulpit, but to the One who sits on the throne! The church is His bride; therefore, we must treat her well! Let us rethink popular culture's mindset of membership, and set our loyalty to the Lord by being all in to His work, His direction, and His purpose for His church.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord changes your heart towards His work, His direction, and His purpose for His church. Also pray that the Lord gives you an excitement to be all in.

Focus Challenge: Make a personal commitment today, that if you are currently not serving in your church, to be led by the Lord to serve in a particular area and/or ministry in your congregation.

Study Focus: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Psalms 133:1; Luke 10:27; Ephesians 4:1-6

DAY SIX

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 1:17 “*Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.*”

It's fascinating how through the years, words have been redefined. For example, the word “church”. Today, we say statements like, “let's go to church”, or “Are you going to church today?” This kind of conversation would never have been spoken of amongst the first congregation in the New Testament. Their understanding of the word “church” was not that it was a place to attend for fellowship and worship of the Lord, instead, they understood that they were the church and the place of worship! Through the years, “church”, has been minimized to a “place” as opposed to who we are “the people of God”. History tells us that in New Testament times, worship occurred on the way to the temple. Singing and dancing occurred while they walked as a family to the place of meeting. When they arrived, the anticipation was to hear the word of God through the reading of the Scriptures. They would then eat and break bread together. They were mesmerized by the teaching of the Word and by the fellowship of their community. Today, it seems as if congregants are mesmerized more by who is preaching and who is singing. This can cause an unhealthy praise of the preacher and the singer. The “church” is becoming a place of entertainment, as opposed to the people being the church and the people who give God all the honor and the praise. It's time that we go back to breaking bread! In the first New Testament church, breaking bread together had a deep meaning. It meant, that when I break bread with you, and I give you your portion, I am saying to you, “what is mine is yours”, “I make a covenant with you, that I will not speak against you or ill will on your behalf. For we are brothers and sisters for life”. This is why in John 6 Jesus calls Himself the “Bread of Life”. So when we “break bread”, we are reminded of how Jesus made a covenant with us by the breaking of His life on our behalf that we might be His church! We must learn and know the deeper meaning of being the church and breaking bread together. We do this in three ways. First, we must build intentional community. We must learn to be more intentional with our brothers and sisters by creating opportunities to connect, to fellowship and break bread together. Second, we must build opportunistic cooperation. It is important that we come together and work in unity as we help others, plan together, and develop vision and direction for our congregations. The body of Christ is filled with amazing people who have God given gifts and talents. Cooperating together for one goal and purpose is a must! Finally, we must build internal spiritual growth. This is done with discipleship in

mind. We were created for the Lord's pleasure and purpose, but we were also created for each other. Desiring to see our brothers and sisters grow in the Lord is the true meaning of breaking bread! It is taking personal responsibility in seeing them grow in the Lord and in the power of His word. Therefore, let us not raise each other "in church", rather let us raise each other in Christ so that we may know what it means to be the church. Let us covenant with each other by the breaking of bread as one body.

Prayer Focus: Pray the Lord gives you a deeper understanding of what it means to be the church. In turn, pray for the Church and the congregation of which you are a member of.

Focus Challenge: Today, create opportunities to fellowship and to break bread with members of your congregation. Reach out to someone today and invite them over your home for food, fellowship and study.

Study Focus: John 6:35-40; Acts 2:42-47

DAY SEVEN

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 “¹²For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many.”

Who is the “church”? The church are those who have been saved by the grace of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the confession of Jesus as Savior and Lord. Being the church has nothing to do with our affiliation with a specific denomination. Instead, we are the church because we belong to Him! Because we are the church, by belonging to God, we now have the honor of representing a Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom consists of the following: 1. The Father 2. The Son 3. The Holy Spirit 4. The saints of God around the world whether past, present and future 5. The greater Kingdom work. Therefore, what is the church called to do as representatives of His Kingdom? * Love God * Glorify God * Display God’s grace * Evangelize * Biblically instruct/ teach * Baptize * Edify and love one another * Disciple in word and action * Fellowship with one another * Care for each other * Be salt and light * Promote the marvelous works of our King (to name a few). We are part of an amazing Kingdom and an extraordinary family! We were created for the Lord and for each other. Until we grasp this reality, we will never truly understand who we are and what we have. So what is the role of the church? As we consider Scripture, we must look at the following passage and consider two things: 1. Is what we read a description of what the church used to be like? 2. Is what we read a prescription of what we should be like? (Read Acts 2:42-47) These passages show an amazing description, but also a realistic prescription of what the church can be. The first New Testament church had six specific characteristics. 1. They were a devoted people (vs. 42- to the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer). 2. People of awe (vs. 43- they were people that feared to do each other wrong. They had sincere reverence for the things of God and each other. 3. They were together (vs. 44- By having all things in common, as well as together in growing in spiritual unity). 4. They were a blessing to others (vs. 45- They gave up their homes, shared with their hearts, and met the needs of the body). 5. They were faithful attenders (vs. 46- They were faithful in their worship at the temple, faithful in going from home to home for fellowship and connection, they ate their meals together, they had gladness and

sincerity of heart towards one another, and their love was genuine). 6. They were worshippers (vs.47- They worshipped in unity and the Lord kept adding to their number). Individually and as a family, we must make it a point to realize the blessing that it is to be the church of the Lord Jesus. We must understand the honor and the privilege we are given to be in unity with the Lord and with those in who Jesus died for. Let us truly be the church!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord gives you a desire to live out the Acts model of genuine love, service and blessings towards the church.

Focus Challenge: Today, call someone from the church (preferably an individual you don't know that well) and/or invite them over for fellowship and communication.

Study Focus: Acts 2

DAY EIGHT

Scripture Focus: Hebrews 10:24-25 “²⁴ And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

As time waits for no one, the shifting of our culture and its thinking does the same. According to a recent Gallup Poll, church attendance has taken a massive hit these past several years. Less than 20% of Americans regularly attend church, and every year, more than 4000 churches and congregations are closing their doors. One of the greatest reasons for this declining trend is due to “cyber church”. In a cyber generation that builds its services online to purchase food, clothing, electronics, pay bills, etc., the church has also found itself in the same mode of thinking and consumerism. Connection to the internet in this technological age, is seen as more convenient and unfortunately is seen as more trust worthy than a physical human touch. Technology is not bad, but as a church, what can we give this culture, this unchurched generation, that technology or media can’t give them? We can give them our lives! A human touch! This comes down to a discipleship issue. When we recognize the necessity for church attendance, connections, fellowship and serving those who Christ died for, church attendance will return to growth and not decline! Let’s consider 3 benefits of being a biblically active member of a congregation.

1. **It fulfills a need for community.** We were created for each other. People don’t necessarily attend church solely to hear the word, but to also develop relationships and connection.
2. **It encourages personal growth.** The moment we stop attending church; we will see a decline in our spiritual life as well. The Lord created us to connect, sharpen iron, and to worship together. As King David says, “*O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together*” (Psalm 34:3). We all have our blind spots. Our brothers and sisters are there to help us see our spiritual blind spots. If our growth in Christ is at the top of our list, then being an active member in the body of Christ comes with it. Every aspect of our connection in the body helps us grow!
3. **It causes us to disciple each other.** We were given the greatest commandment- Go make disciples. Making disciples goes beyond a class, a Bible study or a sermon series; Making disciples is the vulnerable response

of doing life together. It is connection, fellowship, service, worship, breaking bread, and doing all this as a lifestyle. Discipleship is the benefit of being an active member of the body. Let's learn and grow together!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord teaches us what it means to disciple, connect, fellowship, and sharpen iron with our brothers and sisters.

Focus Challenge: If you are not currently discipling someone or being discipled, make this your day where that will change. Contact someone in your church body and make it happen!

Study Focus: Romans 12:1-21; Proverbs 27:17; Ephesians 4:14-16

DAY NINE

Scripture Focus: 1 John 3:1-3 “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*”² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

The Bible tells us in Luke 12, that to whom much is given, much in return is expected. This is a strong statement because it places responsibility upon the one whom much is given. As Believers and followers of Jesus, we have been given much (salvation, forgiveness, peace, mercy, grace, hope, love, and eternal life...to name a few). Therefore, if we have been given much from the Lord, much is required. Not necessarily that much is required from the Lord, in as much that much is expected from a lost and watching world. In a culture that seeks to find truth, it is expected that absolute truth is seen in those and through those who claim to know the truth in Jesus. This world seeks and searches for “the difference”. For the first time in a long time, we are living in a generation that wants to hear from the church. They desire to experience what we ourselves have experienced through Jesus. Let’s be the church, but let’s not be “that church”. Here’s the explanation; when it is said, “Let’s not be that church”- it means, that as people desire connection, community, and developing true genuine relationships (from the church), not being “that church” is doing the opposite. Often times, “that church”, has members who won’t welcome visitors. Or members who are not genuinely friendly to guests. Let’s not be “that church” ass people desire to see genuiness, especially from those who lead. However, being “that church” has leaders that overlook the “peasant”. Leaders who have created their own cliques. Leaders who care more about their time, as opposed to investing in others. Ministry and ministers do not have a stage- Jesus has the throne! People want to know Jesus, and desire to know Him for who He is. Being “that church” will have members that live opposite of how Jesus encouraged us to live. Members that show no difference between the church and the actions of the world. They only show Jesus at church, but show a completely different person on social media or away from a church service. People hunger for truth and desire the real deal. The true church learns to love like Jesus, touch like Jesus, heal like Jesus, act like Jesus, react like Jesus, and speak like Jesus. May we not be another reason why people would reject

Christ. May we show, through our lives, that our God is real and that He still changes people's lives!

Prayer Focus: Pray that Lord will give you the desire to be an example to a watching world. Also, the desire to repent if you have found yourself living opposite of who Jesus is.

Focus Challenge: If you have found yourself hurting your testimony in front of others, even after confessing to them that you are a Christian, ask for their forgiveness. It will change their perspective of you and on Christ.

Study Focus: 1 John 2; 1 John 3

DAY TEN

Scripture Focus: Luke 7:37-38 “*And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume,³⁸ and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.*”

Matthew 26:6-7 “*Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper,⁷ a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.*”

We see two instances of women pouring oil/perfume on Jesus (Mary Magdalene and Mary the sister of Lazarus). Both instances have amazing significance as well as symbolism. The first one, (Mary Magdalene), gave her best and poured her best on Jesus’ feet. Despite the “kind” of woman she was, or the things she had done, or the pain she was in, Jesus didn’t see her as a harlot or as a promiscuous woman, He saw her as one who could be forgiven! Grace, love, and mercy was given to her, in spite of her past. In the second account, Mary, we see a similar story when a vial of costly perfume was poured on the head of Jesus. However, this pouring was to thank Him for His love, mercy and grace. Both ladies named Mary, both ladies poured perfume/oil, both times were significant and similar. They were similar in that they poured their best. It wasn’t old oil or old perfume that they had laying around; it was the expensive kind..., their best! We must learn what it means to give God our best. When we say “best”, it’s not necessarily wearing your “Sunday’s best”, instead it is the giving of our heart’s best, our mind’s best, our mouth’s best, our motive’s best, and our spiritual best. We give God our best because of what He did and what He is going to do! Mary Magdalene gave her best as a response to His forgiveness. The other Mary gave her best, thanking Him for what He was about to do (be crucified for our sins). The second similarity we see is that they were not ashamed to present themselves. Both women poured their best on Jesus in front of an audience. Despite the people saying things about them or the indignation against them, these women seemed to block it all out and focused on the One who loved them. Their worship was unhindered! Can we learn today to not allow our worship to the Lord be hindered by those who may not understand? May we learn to worship God because of Him and not by what others may think or say. We honor Him because of who He is, what He has done, and because He

deserves our praise! Finally, we see that these ladies, and their praise for Jesus, was forever. They never stopped following and serving Jesus. Mary Magdalene served Jesus all the days of her life. She was even one of the people who followed Jesus to the cross and saw Him crucified. The other Mary, according to Jesus, will be remembered and spoken of in her memory; Matthew 26:13 *"Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."*

May our praise be forever. May we pour our best forever. May we honor our King forever...because forever, one day, we will be with Him!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord will show you and lead you in giving your best to Him. Also pray a prayer of repentance for giving the Lord scraps, if indeed this has been your action.

Focus Challenge: Find ways today of giving the Lord your best. Whether that be serving others, blessing someone, giving back your first fruits through your tithes and offerings, or finally serving in the church of which you are a member. Or giving your best by being a better parent, child, student, employee, boss, minister, sibling, etc.

Study Focus: Colossians 3:23-24; 2 Timothy 2:15; Colossians 3:17

DAY ELEVEN

Scripture Focus: 1 John 1:1-4 “*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*”

When we consider the gospel, we must recognize that it goes beyond just a story. The process in which Jesus took upon Himself, on behalf of all humanity, encompasses so much more. The Lord used all of man’s five senses to help us understand what He actually did on our behalf. Unfortunately to the lost, it often takes more than a story to convince them of this reality. Therefore, the apostle John wrote this letter, utilizing our five senses to describe his encounter with Jesus. John said that he saw Jesus, heard Him speak, and touched Him. How would that relate to us today? How can we see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste of Jesus and the gospel? First, how can the world “see” Jesus? Though us! Our lives are to be a reflection of the person of Christ. How people see what we claim, is how they will see Jesus and what He claimed. We are to be examples of Him. People are watching. Second, how can the world “hear” Jesus? By our speaking of the truth...in love. It’s how we speak, and of what we speak. Do our conversations honor the One we represent? Do we speak of the Lord and the good things He has done for us? Do we share with our mouths the power of the gospel? The greatest form of evangelism goes beyond how we act, there is power in the spoken word! Third, how can the world “touch” Jesus? This is when we must learn to be the arms and hands of Christ. He can touch through us. The human touch is amazing and is desired by all mankind. However, when we do so in the name of Jesus and through His love, it is then that people can sense that Jesus is there! Fourth, how can the world “smell” Jesus? As funny as this sounds, the truth is that people can always “smell” a fake. This world and culture needs to smell the real CHURCH! Not the fake, up and down, inconsistent, fleshly, hypocritical, church-going pretenders, rather the ones who truly display the essence of Jesus. Fifth, how can the world “taste” of Jesus? We must live in such a way that people around us can “taste” of the goodness of God. Our words and actions either leave a positive impression or

leave a bad taste in the mouths of others. Let's not give a watching world a bitter taste. When we speak, may it be seasoned with salt and like honey on their lips. Let's learn to give this world something to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste, and we do this by being like Jesus!

Prayer Focus: Pray the Lord will keep you consistent in Him, and that your life will reflect Christ through the five senses.

Focus Challenge: Try using the five senses in showing Christ this week

Study Focus: 1 John 1; Psalms 34:8

DAY TWELVE

Scripture Focus: 2 Timothy 2:2 “*You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.*”

Some of the strongest statements concerning discipleship came from the mouth of Jesus. The reality is, anyone can be a church member, but not everyone will be a disciple. What makes discipleship challenging in this culture, is that many would rather be a disciple of “other things” rather than of Christ. In other words, that which we faithfully follow, is of what we are disciples. The role of the church is to be, to raise, and to reproduce disciples. We must desire as the church not to be “false advertisement” but the real deal! As serious that Christ is about us being His disciples, is as serious we must be about being His disciples. How do personally aim at being His disciples? First, we must “come after Jesus” (Luke 9:23). To come after Jesus means to follow Him and to imitate what He did. We are to deny ourselves, take up His cross, and follow Him. Jesus expresses this by showing His obedience to the Father. If we desire to be like Jesus, obedience is the key to being a disciple. Going after Jesus doesn’t necessarily mean going to church. Going after Jesus means to understand that we are the church and the people of His possession! Second, we must be “in His word” (John 8:31-32). If our goal is to be disciples, then we must learn to read, study, and memorize the scriptures. Often times, our scripture reading is only on Sundays when the pastor encourages us to open our Bibles. Unfortunately, even then we don’t bring our Bibles because the scripture is written on the screen! We are to be in the word, learn God’s word, search God’s word, study God’s word, apply God’s word, and in turn to live it out. Third, as disciples we must learn to “love one another” (John 13:34-35). The world is watching; and will know if we are truly the Lord’s disciples by seeing if we love one another. Disciples don’t hold grudges, they love each other. Disciples don’t gossip, they love each other. When this lost world sees true genuine Godly love from those who belong to Jesus, it is then they will know that there is truly a God in heaven. Finally, as disciples, we are to “bear fruit” (John 15:8). Maturity in Christ is what God desires of us. Maturity means to bear fruit. What hate once had, **love** now takes over. What depression once settled, **joy** overcame. When chaos ensued, **peace** controlled. When we were once impatient, now we have long suffering and **patience**. When a rude word would blurt out, now **kindness** is ruler. When being mean is who we were, **goodness** is who we are. When being brash was our personality, now **gentleness** is our character. When faithlessness was our

sin, now **faithfulness** is our life. When being over the top was normal, now **self-control** is our standard. To be a disciple means to mature and grow in Christ, His word, and His character. Let us prove to be His disciples.

Prayer Focus: Pray the Lord will help you grow in all aspects in Him through the process of discipleship.

Focus Challenge: Today begin a Bible study regimen that will help you grow and mature in Christ.

Study Focus: Luke 9:23; John 8:31-32; John 13:34-35; John 15:8

DAY THIRTEEN

Scripture Focus: 1 John 4:15-19 “*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.* ¹⁶ *We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* ¹⁷ *By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.* ¹⁸ *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.* ¹⁹ *We love, because He first loved us.*”

The letters of John are absolutely rich when comprehending the topic of love. In just four verses, John had much to say about love, and in turn gives a deeper understanding of both salvation and love. Salvation and love go hand and hand. There is no other religion, philosophy, and/or religious “god” besides Christianity, that takes (sees, expresses, explains, shows) the word love like the Lord. At the same time, there is no other form of belief system that understands the importance of love like the followers of Jesus do. Love is a foundational emotion and action of our salvation. Salvation has 3 foundations: 1. The Word of God (Romans 10:17). 2. The Holy Spirit (John 15:26). 3. Love and Kindness (Romans 2:4). It is through the hearing of God’s word that faith comes. It is the Holy Spirit who draws us to the Father, and in turn becomes our Helper. It is in the love and kindness of God who led us to repentance. Love played a significant role in our salvation! Verse 15 tells us that if we have confessed that “Jesus is the Son of God”, then we abide in Him, and in turn, God abides in us. God is love; and if God’s love abides in us, then “we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us” (vs.16). We cannot say we are followers of Jesus and in turn have not love. Love is the very thing that separates us from those who don’t believe. “By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgement” (vs.17). When love us perfected in us, we then have confidence when we go before the Lord to be judged. In judgement, we will not be seen as His enemies, but as His children! This is why we are confident. He will not be our judge but our Savior! Therefore, “because as He is, so also we are in this world” (vs.17). We are heirs of the kingdom, partakers of His covenant, covered by His blood, and children of the most high God! It was His love for us that allowed us this position. Because we belong to Him, “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear” (vs.18). When we find ourselves loving Jesus and in turn loving like Him, fear diminishes because we are in Him and He in turn is in us! God’s love is neither punishment

nor holds us hostage. His love is pure and real. Since He abides in us, He shows us how to love like Him, even those whom we find difficult to love. Why are we able to love like Jesus? “We love, because He first loved us” (vs.19). Let’s learn to walk in love and in turn give love like Jesus does.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord teaches you to love like He loves.

Focus Challenge: Challenge yourself to love the ones in your life who are difficult to love. Allow the Holy Spirit to love through you.

Study Focus: Romans 10:17; John 15:26; Romans 2:4; Romans 5:8;

DAY FOURTEEN

Scripture Focus: Psalms 143:10 “*Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.*”

There are always unique individuals in the body of Christ. Loud ones, quiet ones, creative ones, administrative ones, introverted ones, and extroverted ones. There are also ones that are easy to love, and others that are not so easy to love. Interestingly enough, everyone plays a unique role in our congregations. Unfortunately, there are some “questionable characters” amongst the body. This kind of individual can be toxic and detrimental to the flock, if they are not prayerfully approached to lovingly make them aware of their actions. An unteachable person in the church is one of the most dangerous in the church! We all have flaws, however, this kind of person has certain characteristics which must be changed.

1. **Can't teach them new things.** This person thinks they have it all figured out. Therefore, to showing them a different perspective or angle will likely offend them- because they “know it all”.
2. **They are critical.** This person critiques all areas of ministry and plays “Monday Morning Quarterback”, as they explain what everyone is doing wrong. They will shoot verbal bullets at the leader and get those around them to agree with those critical words. They do not know the difference between constructive and destructive criticism.
3. **They are divisive.** Most unteachable people are divisive in that fact that they want others to agree with them, causing a sort of “civil war” amongst the body.
4. **They are a robber of joy.** Because of this person’s character, they make people cringe when they show up to an event, or when you see their name on your caller ID. Their track record speaks for itself. Is this you? Do you find yourself being unteachable? Are you willing to learn even if it stretches your character? So what are the keys to being teachable?

1. **A teachable person studies God's word.** Why is this important? Because a person who studies the scripture is more apt to adhere to its instructions. Therefore, allowing for teachability.
2. **A teachable person is attentive.** Their desire is to learn. They also find themselves taking advantage of opportunities to learn (i.e.; Bible studies, sermons, podcasts, videos, school, etc.).
3. **A teachable person is humble.** They aren’t prideful. They humble themselves before the Lord and serve others above themselves. Life isn’t about them, it’s about others!
4. **A teachable person is a powerful person.** Why? Because they know that they don’t know everything and in turn seek the advice of others. When we learn to be teachable, we are ok with saying “I don’t know”. Let’s learn to be

teachable and not toxic. Let's be willing to learn and avoid being a detriment to the body. We all have much to learn, but it's a joy when we learn together!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit shows you if you are an unteachable person who has become divisive and ungodly. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a new heart and spirit to learn.

Focus Challenge: Make it your challenge that this next Sunday you take the most notes you have ever taken on a sermon, go home and study it for the whole week... And then do it again!

Study Focus: Hebrews 13:7; Hebrews 13:17; Acts 17:11; Isaiah 51:1; Matthew 13:16-17; Psalms 25:9; Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 15:22

DAY FIFTEEN

Scripture Focus: Galatians 6:1-5 “*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.* ² Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. ⁵ For each one will bear his own load.”

Galatians 6:7-8 “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.* ⁸ *For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*”

Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world. Though we as Christians live in this world and are not of it, does not mean we are immune from the trials, temptations and struggles that come from living here. Just this past year we have heard the horror stories of faith based leaders and preachers that have fallen due to immorality. Though these stories are no longer a shock to us, it still shakes the inner core of our being. When one falls, we all feel it! The reality is, though our spiritual battles have been won through Christ Jesus, Christians can still find themselves slipping and falling. It doesn’t matter who we are, we are all prone to failure and mess-ups. The question that we must ask ourselves is, “If a brother and/or sister does happen to fall, what should be my response”? In verse 5, the apostle Paul gives an important insight in the case this does occur. He calls on those “who are spiritual” to render aid. It is the spiritual person who is more likely in tune with the Lord and His word. It is the spiritual person who will be more capable of discerning and hearing the Holy Spirit’s prompting in the life of a person who needs restoration. However, one who is not spiritual can crush and further hurt to the person who failed. This is why the “return rate” of those who have failed, in returning to the Lord and the church is slim. If approached by one who is not in tune with the Lord, things can become even worse off than before. If someone does fall or fail, a spirit of gentleness is so important in winning back a brother or sister (vs 1). This does not mean that we “ok” what this person did, or even agree with their failure, rather it is gentleness in truth and with love that we must approach such a one. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin, it is we that are spiritual that assist in restoration. The fact that we need each other is what makes the body of Christ so

amazing. We were created for each other. If we cannot lean on our brothers and sisters, then who can we trust and lean on? Why should we restore our brother or sister who failed? Because we too can be tempted and be found in the same situation. Let us learn to be spiritual, lifting each other up, and assist in the restoration of one who has fallen. Not with condemnation, but with truth in love. Each of us have a load to carry!

Prayer Focus: Pray for someone you might know who has failed and needs to be restored. Ask the Holy Spirit to use you in the case something like this happens to someone you know. At the same time, pray that you not fail as well.

Focus Challenge: Research scriptures that you can memorize that will keep you focused and free from falling!

Study Focus: Galatians 6:1-5; Galatians 7-8;

DAY SIXTEEN

Scripture Focus: Acts 3:1-10 “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. ² And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. ⁴ But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” ⁵ And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” ⁷ And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. ⁸ With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God; ¹⁰ and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”

There is a dynamic that God causes in the life of those who are consistent in prayer. Prayer is powerful, not by the mere words that are spoken on our behalf, but because of the God we beseech! When we practice the presence of God and His Holy Spirit, and practice the power of prayer, it is then that we are entrusted with remarkable things. Let us consider 5 specific aspects in the Acts passage. First, we see that Peter and John were consistent in prayer. Verse 1 tells us that they went to the pray at the temple during “the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.” This shows that they have practiced this before. When something becomes a habit, it can be difficult to break. Can you imagine prayer being your habit? When a life is consistent in prayer, it prepares us for what God is about to do and accomplish. There are plans that the Lord desires to execute through us, but will not move forward if we have not prepared ourselves through our communion in prayer with Him. The Lord was about to change the life of someone through Peter and John. However, if these two were not men of prayer, the Lord would not have necessarily used them to help change a life. Second, we must understand that a life consistent in prayer, is a life confident to speak vitality into others (vs.4-5). Peter told the lame man, “look at us!” They were confident in what they knew Jesus

could accomplish through them. Why such confidence? They spent their time in communion with the Lord. Time with God builds confidence in what we ask. When the lame beggar heard the confidence of Peter, he did what Peter instructed him to do (vs.6-8). When we are confident in prayer, we are able to help others around us to be confident in the power and promises of God! Finally, we must know that a life consistent in prayer recognizes that power is found in the Lord alone and not in us (vs.9-10). When God receives the glory at the end, it's the evidence that we have been with God. It's not about us! At the same time, a life that is consistent in prayer is not mesmerized by what God can accomplish through them, as much as what God does alone! Our lives should reflect the power of God so that others will leave our presence "filled with wonder and amazement" of what God can do through the avenue of prayer.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord teaches you how to stay consistent in your prayer life.

Focus Challenge: If you do not already have one, today, create a prayer journal that will help guide your prayer time. Add requests, concerns, your worship, and your thoughts on this journal while you pray. Also, create a place where you can glory in answered requests!

Study Focus: 1 John 5:14; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalms 34:15

DAY SEVENTEEN

Scripture Focus: Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 “*Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.* ²*Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore, let your words be few.*”

This was such an incredible statement and encouragement from Solomon, as he discusses our approach and response to God as we enter His presence. He begins his statement by using the word “guard”. This word is the Hebrew meaning “Samar” that in its context means “to observe, to be careful”. There is a reason for his encouragement this. Solomon knew how the temple was constructed and built; especially the steps going up to the temple. These steps were made of limestone. Why is this important? This kind of stone was used for two purposes. First, because of the hot summer days in Israel. Israel, especially Jerusalem, can be scorching during the days when the sun was out. Often times, the steps were used to sit down on so the teacher (rabbi) could teach. Limestone however stays cool. So no matter how hot the day was, you can sit on limestone and not have to be concerned of the heat when you were sitting. Secondly, limestone was used because of its slick texture. It would definitely be foolish for someone to run up the stairs as the slippery steps would cause one to fall down flat and badly injure themselves. Therefore, when someone was going up the steps of the temple to enter into the place of worship, this person would have to guard (observe, be careful) concerning their steps as they “go to the house of God”. Is this not a great reminder of how we should be when going to our place of worship? Today, we might not have steps of limestone that we walk on when entering our church buildings, but if we could put this into spiritual perspective, often times we don’t guard, observe, be careful, and/or even consider our hearts and motives when going to worship the Lord with our church family! Sometimes we “run up the steps” to get the hour or two on Sunday over with. Other times, we might find ourselves so preoccupied while going to worship that we can’t grasp the reality of the day until after the second or third worship song! Instead we find ourselves offering “the sacrifice of fools” rather than preparing our hearts and minds to draw close to the Lord and to listen to Him. Solomon calls this attitude “evil”, while God

calls it unholy! We must learn to prepare and guard our steps so that we may effectively hear from the Lord and to offer a holy sacrifice of our lives and motives. As we prepare for our times of worship of the Lord, let us consider accomplishing three things this week before going to church. 1. Guard your steps. Let us prepare ourselves for worship! 2. Draw near and listen. Let's go to our place of worship anticipating and expecting to hear from the Lord. 3. Let our words be few. Let the Holy Spirit do the talking as we do the listening. I'm sure there is much He desires to show us and tell us.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit begins to prepare your heart this week as you go to the house of worship with your family.

Focus Challenge: Write out some things today in your journal that you have found yourself preoccupied with while going to church. Make it a point today to approach the throne of the Lord with joy and clarity and not with frustration and busyness.

Study Focus: Hebrews 10:24-25; Colossians 3:16; Romans 10:17; James 1:22

DAY EIGHTEEN

Scripture Focus: Matthew 18:20 "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.*"

If you have ever been to Israel (and if you haven't, prayerfully one day you will) you'd know that one of the highlights of the week, is the celebration of Shabbat. Shabbat is considered the day of rest for those who practice this Jewish observance. However, it is also a time of celebration, prayer and worship. On Friday morning, people go to the Old Town Jerusalem market and purchase fresh meat, fresh vegetables and fruit among other food items to prepare for their Sabbath dinner. From the morning until the afternoon, there is celebration in the streets. People are dancing, singing, sharing food in the market, while others are praying and worshipping. The festive atmosphere and "family" unity (even with complete strangers), makes the hours before Shabbat the most memorable time in Israel. By sundown, the streets of Jerusalem are empty and bare. What was once a "shoulder to shoulder" experience on the streets, now resembles a "ghost town" since everyone is now in their homes preparing their evening meals and celebration. They do all these things every weekend! Why? Not only have they followed the law of the Lord, but they believe that time with the Lord should always be a joyful celebration without any hindrances. As we reflect on the traditions of our Jewish brothers and consider how we as Christians in America often times worship, there can seem to be a disconnect. As the Jewish people make it a point to not be late in their preparation, the typical church member will usually show up late for church worship, or even debate worshipping with their brothers and sisters at all! We must learn that we are called to worship, but to also worship with each other. If we as a church can follow these three challenges (individually and together), we will be able to taste of the goodness and excitement in worshipping the Lord. First, we must create an anticipation for worship. Wouldn't it be great if we can show up early for worship service with the anticipation to worship the Lord and to hear from Him? When we have an anticipation for God, we will then develop an anticipation for worship! Anticipate singing, anticipate fellowship, anticipate serving, anticipate seeing each other, anticipate a move of God's Holy Spirit in our midst...anticipate! It's better when we do it together. Second, anticipate unity. Our fellowship together is the key. After a long week full of challenges and stresses, our brothers and sisters can be a sight for sore eyes. The Jewish people would actually arrive to worship and hour or two early to make sure

they made time to talk, laugh and pray together. The “Church” in America would be so much more powerful if we learned the power of unity and fellowship. When there is anticipation to worship and unite, the week goes by fast! Third, we must learn to anticipate to bless and to be blessed. When walking into a Jewish place of worship, there are times when you will see older men standing by the door placing their hands over the heads of those entering and giving a blessing. Wouldn’t it be amazing if we saw the older generation blessing the younger generation with prayers of blessing? Wouldn’t it be just as amazing to see the younger generation honor, bless and respect those who came before them? We must learn how to bless each other and to also receive a blessing. This is all about anticipation. Anticipate our worship, our unity, and blessing others to in turn be blessed!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the church (you included) can learn the power of anticipation in our worship, unity, and blessing. Pray the Lord ignites a zeal for Him and His people.

Focus Challenge: Starting today, internally challenge yourself daily bless the people of God, to bless Israel, and to bless the name of the Lord. Do this by showing up early for worship with the anticipation to serving, fellowship, seeing your brothers and sisters and hearing from the Holy Spirit.

Study Focus: Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; Psalms 34:3; Numbers 6:24-26; Psalms 122:6-9; Psalms 113:2; Daniel 2:20

DAY NINETEEN

Scripture Focus: Micah 6:8 “*He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*”

2 Corinthians 5:17 “¹⁷*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*”

If anyone deserves the love, kindness, and mercy award, it's Jesus Himself! If there was anyone who understood the dynamics of Christs' love, kindness and mercy was the former Christian persecutor the apostle Paul. As a matter of fact, Paul states in Romans 2:4 that “...the kindness of God leads you to repentance”. Out of all the so-called “gods”, Jesus was the only one who came to die for His people. He was the only one who ever stated the He loved His people. “For God so loved the world” is more than just a memory verse we grew up memorizing in Sunday School. It's the epitome of why Christ came to die! His blood that was shed on the cross was for the purpose of showing and proving His love for us, but also to change the heart and mind of man. When Jesus changes you, He changes everything about you! He changes your heart, your mind, and the way you look. When the apostle Paul says that “the old things have passed away”, he is talking about all the ways we used to think, attitudes we used to have, language we used to speak, places we used to go, things we used to see, people we used to associate ourselves with, and motives that were unclean. However, when Jesus became Lord of our lives, He took the old things away and put in place our new things, our new life, and our new attitude! Now the way we used to think, we no longer think that way. The way we used to speak, we no longer speak that way. The way people used to see us, they no longer see us that way, now they see us in a different light, because we are now of the Light! The flip side is that there are some who have confessed Jesus as Savior for the forgiveness of sins and change of life, however, their lives have never changed. The old things have not passed, and it seems as though the new things have not replaced the old. This occurs for two reasons. Either the person who has confessed Jesus, with no change, has first never been discipled in the things of the Lord, or second, he has never been truly saved. He may have had an “experience” with Jesus, heard a great sermon that made him think, or was caught up in an emotional moment, but never had a transformation of mind, heart, and spirit. Unfortunately, there are many in our congregations that

attend church, serve in church, and consider themselves Christians, but have never truly had the old pass and the new come. Is that you? Consider today where you stand with Jesus.

Prayer Focus: Pray asking the Holy Spirit to confirm to you if you are truly a child of God. If not, confess Him as Lord and Savior, repenting of your sins.

Focus Challenge: The apostle Paul challenges the church to “test themselves” to see if they are of the faith. Examine yourself today to see if you are truly of the faith, or if your connection with Jesus was a mere experience that had no life transforming power.

Study Focus: 2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18; Matthew 7:21-23

DAY TWENTY

Scripture Focus: Exodus 20:16 “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*”

When God gave us the ten commandments, it was for the purpose of following two important laws; 1. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. 2. To love our neighbor as ourselves. As we consider the ten commandments, we will notice that there is a vertical as well as a horizontal approach to each given commandment. The first four commandments are vertical (towards God), commandments 5-10 are horizontal (towards our neighbor). It would be fair to say that most Christians tend to keep all ten commandments to the best of their ability. However, there is one commandment that seems to be broken the most, and at times, we are unaware that we do. This broken and overlooked commandment is that of bearing false witness. DEFINITION: “*speaking falsely in any matter, lying, equivocating, and any way designing to deceive our neighbor. Speaking unjustly against neighbor to the prejudice of his reputation*”. For example, if we don’t have absolute facts on a person, situation, or idea, and still blurt out a false narrative without truth, this is bearing false witness. If you follow politics, you will see how politicians, news media, and those on social media can find themselves breaking this commandment on a daily basis due to personal, occupation or political leaning. Unfortunately, society and culture are the kings and queens of bearing false witness. If not careful, the church can be close behind! Facts are important. The “he said-she said” narrative only flies well with the ignorant. We are not ignorant; we are disciples of Christ. We are called to be disciples, not dummies! Our witness and stance on truth is of absolute importance. False witness occurs when we create a story to fit our narrative. Even if it’s a half truth, the danger is repeating a story as if it is fully true. False witness also occurs when we have a bitterness in our hearts towards a person or a situation. Due to our sin nature, we can destroy a person’s character, integrity, family, and ministry by creating or sharing a false story! Bearing false witness can also occur when we follow a story that has not been properly vetted. We can find ourselves believing because a friend told us, or it was on the internet, or because its being posted on social media. We never vetted the story or researched the truth, instead, we believed it because it was “juicy” enough for us to want to believe. Sadly, enough, bearing false witness is what many do on a daily basis. Regrettably, we see such things take place in the church. As members of the body, what should we do to

make sure we don't find ourselves bearing false witness? First, follow the truth trail. Be fair. Is this story that I heard the absolute truth, or am I believing it because I want to believe it? Second, we must not create our own narrative. Our motives should be checked on a daily basis. We can hurt someone really bad if our intentions are not pure. Creating a narrative that is not truthful, is a unfortunate way of being a mouthpiece of the devil. Is this story worth repeating? Will it glorify God and edify the church? Finally, every story spoken against someone else, must be met with hesitation. Consider the source. Who said it? Why did they say it? Can this story hurt that person? Does it honor the person? If the church is going to be united, we cannot break this commandment.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit bring you conviction if you have ignorantly and/or knowingly broken the commandment of bearing false witness. Repent if you have.

Focus Challenge: If you have hurt someone by bearing false witness, the challenge for the day is to go to that person and seek their forgiveness so the Lord can bring healing to this situation.

Study Focus: Exodus 23:1-7; Proverbs 19:5; Proverbs 21:28

DAY TWENTY-ONE

Scripture Focus: 2 Peter 3:9 “*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*”

One of the most fascinating stories of love, mercy and redemption, is the story of when Jesus confronts the woman from Samaria. Their conversation is text book when it comes conversational evangelism. When reading about their conversation (found in John 4:5-6), the first thing that we are made aware of is how Jesus exposes this woman’s life. However, there is a greater detail to this conversation than that initial takeaway. The depth of this encounter and its meaning is found in two specific verses, vs. 11, “*Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep...*” and vs. 7, “*Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’*” Jesus asked her to give Him a drink, she replied that He had nothing (bucket, ladle, dipper, etc.) with which to draw the water. Why is this an important part of the conversation? Because Jesus is basically telling her that He was willing to drink from whatever utensil she had with her! Jesus was willing to drink from her bucket, cup, ladle, dipper, germs and all! Despite her being a woman, a Samaritan, and a non-Jew, Jesus is showing us how to respond and love a lost world. When it comes to evangelism, we must learn to meet people where they are. It is found in one of the most dangerous prayers we can ever pray, saying “Lord, let me see people through Your eyes”! When we mean business in telling others about Christ, He will begin to break our hearts for what breaks His. We need to move from merely “liking” people to honestly “loving” people. Today, let’s consider 3 responses to evangelism. First, we must be willing to see others as Jesus does. No matter what their background, habit, lifestyle, political affiliation, or sin of choice, we must see them as “stolen royalty” who need to come back to their Creator! Second, we must be willing to drink out of someone’s (cup, ladle, dipper, bucket). Take them as they are. This doesn’t mean to condone how they are, but to love them in spite of that! If not for the grace of the cross of Calvary in our lives, we too could still be without a Savior. Finally, our approach must be love. Evangelism is more than mere methods and approaches, its foundation is recognizing that the human soul, if separated from God, will be in fire! Evangelism is a heart issue. The heart and love for the eternal destination of all humanity, is the key to being like Jesus. Let’s learn

to love others, accept others, and to approach the lost with urgency. It was after the conversation with Jesus that this woman became an amazing evangelist herself!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord will allow you to see people through His eyes and to break your heart for what breaks His. Ask the Lord to give you a sincere love for the sincerely lost!

Focus Challenge: Today, as the Lord begins to change your heart, make it a point to share the Gospel with someone this week. Start with a family member.

Study Focus: John 4:5-26; 1 Corinthians 13:1

DAY TWENTY-TWO

Scripture Focus: 2 Corinthians 5:20 "*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*"

Believe it or not, people desire to hear and to speak of spiritual things. They may not necessarily believe the way you do, but the conversation is almost always welcomed. When we truly begin to speak of the things of God and salvation, you will be pleasantly surprised how open and willing people are to have this conversation. Remember, it's all a matter of the heart. Do we really love people? Do we truly desire to be used of the Lord to share the power of the gospel? Let's consider 4 approaches when doing evangelism. First, we must aim at the heart. When we aim at the heart of an individual, you awaken their conscience.

Everyone, including those who may not believe in God, have a heart. Aim at their heart. Why? Because the Lord has placed "eternity in their hearts". They may not acknowledge God as their Lord, or Jesus as their Savior, but in their hearts they know there is something beyond this life. How do we aim at the heart to awaken the conscience? Share with them the reality of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection...because He loved them (use the Roman Road to show them this reality)! Second, aim at their conscience. According to scripture, the "conscience bears witness" of the law of God. God's law convicts people of their sin. Even a skeptic cannot fight their conscience. Everyone knows there is a right and wrong. When we place God's truth in front of the lost, it's difficult to dispute the wrong we all have committed. Third, we must always preach the cross. The cross is the center of the Gospel; for God so loved the world! No other "god" ever did for us or accomplished what our God did. He sent Jesus to the cross to take our place and give us an opportunity to repent of our sins and to make Him our Savior and Lord! Finally, we must always bathe in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who draws man to the Father. He also resides in us! He therefore loves through us, speaks through us, and touches through us. Every morning we should pray that the Holy Spirit would send us to someone or that He would send someone to us that needs to hear the life changing power of the gospel! When we are aware of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, He allows us to be a mouth piece on His behalf, and in turn see one come out of darkness and into Light. Aim at the heart, aim at the conscience, preach the cross (which is the gospel of Christ crucified, buried and risen from the grave), and consistently bathe in the power of the Holy Spirit. We

are called to be “ambassadors for Christ”, therefore let’s represent and present well!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord sends you to someone, or that He sends someone to you who needs to hear about Jesus today.

Focus Challenge: Be on the alert today for someone who needs to hear the power of the Gospel through Christ’s ambassador...you!

Study Focus: Ecclesiastes 3:11; Romans 2:15; Romans 7:7; 1 Peter 2:24; Acts 1:8
(ROMAN ROAD- 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10; 10:13)

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Scripture Focus: John 1:35-42 “Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and *said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”³⁷ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ And Jesus turned and saw them following, and *said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to Him, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?”³⁹ He *said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.⁴¹ He *found first his own brother Simon and *said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means Christ).⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).”

When we consider great evangelists in the Bible, usually the first names that pop up are the likes of John the Baptist, the apostle Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Peter, and even Jesus. Yet there is one follower of Jesus who often times gets overlooked. This person was Andrew. Andrew was not necessarily a “big name”, but he was obedient to the Lord as he played a crucial role in the ministry of Christ. You don’t have to be a celebrity preacher, write a best-selling book, speak on stages in front of thousands, because all it takes is mere obedience to the Lord for the blessings of God to come. We are all called to be evangelists! Andrew shows us in scripture how the Lord used him strategically to reach specific people. If we truly desire to be used of God, He will always place us strategically where He wants us, to use us the way He wants to, and to get glory through us. Because of Andrew’s obedience, he was used to reach one specific person. It is often true to say that some of the most difficult people to reach with the Gospel is not necessarily a complete stranger, but a family member. It’s because our family knows the real us. However, we must remember that the Gospel is powerful enough to reach anybody, especially family! Andrew started with his brother Peter. Peter in turn became the first pastor of the New Testament church! You never know the plans that the Lord has for those you call family. We must never miss out on opportunities that the Lord gives us with our family members. Whether it be our parents, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, or even grandparents, the Lord may have a special plan for them that we don’t see yet. Yet it takes obedience and courage to share the Gospel with our family even when we think they won’t listen to us. I’m sure Andrew

would have never of imagined what Peter would become. In the same way, we never know the plans the Lord has for our family. It just takes boldness to share and watch what God does!

Prayer Focus: Pray specifically for a family member or members who need Christ.

Focus Challenge: Make it a goal this week to call up a family member you have been praying for and boldly share the good news of Jesus with them. Make sure to call some brothers and sisters in the church to pray for you as you share.

Study Focus: John 1:35-42; John 6:1-10; John 12:20-26

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Scripture Focus: Ezekiel 37:3-6 “*He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, You know.”*”⁴ Again He said to me, “*Prophesy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.’*”⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. *“I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord.”*’”

What a humbling picture of spiritual death. The Lord compares it to having dry bones. Ezekiel writes and describes that these dry bones were not a mere handful, rather a valley filled with dry bones. Similarly, we unfortunately live in a time and culture where we find valleys of dry bones among us. However, these dry bones are not necessarily in our communities, in our neighborhoods, or in our cities; these valleys of dry bones are in our congregations! There seems to be a spiritual sickness that is spreading as we see people on a daily basis leave the church and leave the faith altogether. The excitement and joy in serving the Lord has been gone. Have you found yourself in this valley? Have you ever wondered to yourself if you are spiritually becoming dry? Here are 4 ways we know that we are approaching spiritual death and the valley of dry bones.

1. **The story of the cross no longer moves you.** It’s unfortunate that as Christians, we can come to a place where the Gospel message of the cross and the things Jesus did for us, ceases to move and stir our souls. It has become more of a story we hear during the Easter season, rather than a life changing message. We have become callous to the story, and in turn have become dry to the things of God.
2. **You begin fooling yourself.** We start “believing” that everything is good with us spiritually, but in reality, it’s not. We have justified our reason and logic to overcome the truths of scripture and in turn follow our feelings rather than the standards of God.
3. **We find ourselves absent from worship services more frequently.** There are legitimate times that we have work, get sick, go out of town, and take an occasional Sunday off. However, we can become spiritually dry when this becomes our habit. In the long run, this can cause us to feel no conviction in missing weekly worship with our church family. Being away from the body of Christ can cause spiritual dryness and spiritual death! When we make church absence a habit, we immediately become dry bones.
4. **Worldly things attract you more than spiritual things.** When we find ourselves comfortable doing things we at one time were not comfortable

doing, we have been bitten by the world. When we start doing things, saying things, watching things, and going to places we never did while in Christ, we are becoming dry bones. If we have found ourselves in this dry place, our bones are in desperate need of life! What should we do to get our spiritual life back? Repent for leaving the Lord and His presence. Confess to a brother or sister for spiritual accountability and healing. Wipe the dust off you, don't condemn yourself and start over with the Lord!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord breathe new life in you if you have found yourself dry and spiritually dying. Pray for someone that you know that needs prayer if they are currently away from the Lord.

Focus Challenge: Personally challenge yourself to be genuine if you have found yourself in a valley of dry bones. Make this a week of connecting with other believers, attending a worship service, and commit yourself to read the scriptures daily.

Study Focus: Ezekiel 37:1-14; 1 Corinthians 3:18; James 1:22; Hebrews 10:25; Romans 8:5-7

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

Scripture Focus: 2 Timothy 3:1-5 “*But realize this, that in the last day’s difficult times will come.* ² *For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,* ³ *unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,* ⁴ *treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,* ⁵ *holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.*”

The apostle Paul was a mentor to several men in the ministry. One in particular was Timothy. Timothy was a young man who became the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Paul not only discipled and mentored Timothy, but also wrote him two amazing letters that to this day is relevant to all who read it. Paul writes his letter to Timothy around A.D. 67. What we can find fascinating is that it sounds like he is writing it today! Everything that Paul warns Timothy that would happen in the last days, are actually happening in our generation. Unfortunately, this passage sounds like the days we are living in. Every characteristic that is described by Paul in this passage, is a representation of this culture. These attributes do not necessarily describe a person who is young, but one of any age who has found themselves denying the power of God. If you are a parent this may hit close to home. This may sound like your child. At the same time, if you are a child, this may sound like your parents. The question we should ask ourselves is, “How do we approach this if this is happening in our homes?” First, we must make it a point, that in our homes, and amongst our family, we teach a true biblical worldview. Forget about being “cool”, having biblical standards in the home is essential! We must teach scripture, sound doctrine, and must assist our family in their daily walk with the Lord. Second, we must adhere to Proverbs 22:6, “*Train up a child in the way they should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” This is not necessarily a promise, but a command that we are to uphold when it comes to training our children and family as we are living in the last days. Third, we must learn to encourage personal application. Assisting our children and family to live out scripture is important. However, we cannot live out scripture if we are not in the scriptures! Family Bible studies are an important part in keeping to a biblical worldview. When a family is together in the scriptures, it would be that much more difficult for anyone in the family to leave the Lord or to fall into the characteristics that Paul is sharing with Timothy. It’s never too late. Begin now in recognizing the

importance and urgency we should have for our families and their walk in Christ. With gentleness, patience, and love, let's approach recognizing the days are evil and time is of the essence.

Prayer Focus: Pray specifically, by name, for each of your family members and focus on their walk with Christ.

Focus Challenge: Begin making it habit to have weekly or daily Bible studies with your family. Start today!

Study Focus: 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:1-9

DAY TWENTY-SIX

Scripture Focus: John 15:8 “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*”

There is a big difference between a church member and a disciple. Ironically enough, it can be too easy these days to call oneself a member of a church; easier still, to call themselves a Christian. Anyone can call themselves a Christian and not live up to that name. In the same way there is a major difference between being a disciple and being a church member. For example: a church member can attend their church on the basis of what that congregation can do for them. A disciple, however, is all about being a servant to that body. A church member often times will get connected with their church family at their time and at their convenience. A disciple is one whose desire is to connect for the purpose of fellowship and serving. A church members receiving of the word is only on Sundays. A disciple desires to receive the word daily in his/her life. A church member is often times a “hit and miss”. You will see them one Sunday, and may not see them again until months later. A disciple is always amongst the body of Christ. Though these examples can be painted with a broad brush, the reality is that there is a difference between the two. The question we must ask ourselves is, “Am I a member on a church roster? Or am I a disciple”? As disciples we are encouraged to make a difference and an impact. We are not only to be disciples, but also raise disciples and reproduce disciples. We are called to walk, do, and celebrate life together! The greatest joy is to take root and bear fruit. Even greater, is when we see others around us doing and striving for the same thing. One of the greatest challenges we have is serving the Lord and His people consistently. Being a disciple of Christ means to literally change the standards of our living and submitting under God’s biblical standards for us. What if we were to de-emphasize what we once thought was important and comfortable, and commit to depth and authenticity by proving to be Christ’s disciples? What if your church family became a genuine place of true discipleship making? What kind of congregants would you have? We would have those who would put others above themselves (love); those who would serve others without complaining (joy); those who would desire for all to be as one family (peace); those who would genuinely do life with others (patience); those who would extend a helping hand (kindness); those who would meet the needs of others before themselves (goodness); those who would answer others with respect (gentleness); those who would be “all in” to what God is doing in their church

(faithfulness); those who would not rush the Lord or step ahead of what He's doing among those He died for (self-control). A disciple is one who lives out the fruit of the Spirit and in turn proves that he is what he says he is. Is that you?

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit shows you if you are more of a member on a church roster or if you are one who truly desires to be a disciple. Ask the Lord to help you to become what glorifies Him...a disciple.

Focus Challenge: Make it a point today that you challenge yourself to bear fruit on daily basis.

Study Focus: John 15; Galatians 5:22

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Scripture Focus: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

There is always a reason as to why we take our vitamins, try to maintain a healthy diet, and create a healthier way of living. We want to be physically vigorous! In the same way, there is a spiritual regimen we must adhere to if we want to have a healthy walk in Christ. The Lord’s desire is for all His children to grow in Him and to remain the same year after year. The focus of the Christian life should be to grow in all aspects of the Lord. Everything we do must be with the mindset and purpose of godliness. However, this takes discipline. Unfortunately, Christians can be the most undisciplined people on this planet. Discipline without direction is drudgery! If we truly desire to grow in the Lord, bear fruit, and to be used mightily of Him, it will take a regimen of certain things in order to meet this goal. First, we must pursue holiness. Therefore, what we say, how we think, what we do, where we go, how we act, how we react, is all a matter of personal holiness. Are the commands that God has stated in His word important to us? Holy living promotes strong spiritual disciplines. If our desire is to live holy as the Lord is holy, we will find our intentions and motives changing for the best. It takes discipline. Second, we must recognize that godly people are disciplined people. When we consider some of the most amazing spiritual pioneers of the past and present, we will immediately find that they are people of discipline. We will never meet a man or a woman who comes to spiritual maturity without discipline. Godliness comes through discipline. God often times uses catalysts for changing and conforming us into Christlikeness. For example, He can use people in helping us become more disciplined. A true brother or sister in Christ can help in keeping us accountable, sharp, focused and strong. The Lord can also use our circumstances in keeping us disciplined. Whether it be financial challenges, physical ailments, work, school, or even ministry, the Lord will always grab our attention in one way or another. This is why it is important that we do not learn the hard way, but instead, learn easy! However, it takes discipline. Our purpose in life is to be godly. Yet, in order to live out godliness, it must come from a disciplined life. Discipline is focused on the

things that are spiritual and from God. If we truly want to be more like Jesus, it starts with living a life of discipline.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord gives you a heart and spirit of discipline, for the purpose of living godly, holy and fulfilling God's call on your life.

Focus Challenge: Write out in your journal areas of your life in which you can be more disciplined. After you do, find a brother or sister in the Lord who can help you and keep you accountable in living out a true disciplined life.

Study Focus: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Timothy 4:7; Proverbs 27:17

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Scripture Focus: Psalms 119:34 “Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart.”

King David had such a zeal for the word of God. So much so, that chapter 119 in Psalms was dedicated to his love for God’s word. His focus on the scriptures is what helped David become a valiant warrior and an amazing king. If we too learn to be consistent and disciplined in reading and studying God’s word, our lives will not only have strong foundations, but victory in our life will be all too common! We must learn to develop a discipline in Bible intake. Unfortunately, we live in a biblically illiterate generation. Most people in America, including Christians, have found the Bible on their “less likely to read” list. An appetite for the Scriptures is becoming less and less important. We don’t know necessarily if it is due to not believing in the Bible, as much as it is that no one has the time, passion or a hunger to study the Scriptures. According to a recent research from George Barna Institute, Barna states that 48% of Christians could not name the four Gospels; 52% could not identify more than two or three of Jesus’s disciples; 60% of Christians could not name five of the 10 commandments; 61% think the sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham; 71% believe that “God helps those who help themselves”. This is why there is no spiritual discipline more important than the daily intake of God’s word. There is simply no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of the Scriptures. Bible intake is crucial! But Bible intake also consist of several “sub disciplines”. The first discipline is that of hearing God’s word. This is the easiest of the disciplines in that it’s related to hearing. Why is this a discipline? Because if we don’t discipline ourselves to hearing God’s word regularly, then we will either resort to hearing it when we aren’t “busy”, or resort to not hearing it at all. Merely listening is not the point. The purpose and motive behind all Bible intake is obedience to what God says, as this develops Christ likeness in us. There are many ways to hear God’s word (Podcasts, YouTube, Bible audio; Church website, etc.). The second discipline is the reading of God’s word. A recent USA Today poll stated that only 11% of Americans read the Bible on a daily basis. More than half of Americans read it either once a month or never at all. We must learn to find time to read the word. We can do this by setting an alarm on our phones to remind us, or to set a certain time throughout the day in which you do nothing but read the Bible. A third discipline is learning to study God’s word. Author Jerry Bridges puts it like this, “Reading gives us

breadth, but studying gives us depth". Studying the scriptures takes us to greater depths. It's time to get deep! As the Berean church in Acts studied the scriptures, we too must learn the discipline of hearing, reading and studying God's word. His word was given to us for the purpose of knowing Him and seeking His will. His words are true!

Prayer Focus: Pray the Holy Spirit gives you a desire and discipline to hear, read and study the scriptures.

Focus Challenge: Set a time every day that will be for the purpose of hearing, reading and studying. Make this a discipline that you cannot go without!

Study Focus: Luke 11:28; Romans 10:17; Philippians 4:8; Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; Revelation 3:1; Ezra 7:10; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 4:13

DAY TWENTY-NINE

Scripture Focus: Psalms 119:11 “*Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.*”

King David and his heart for the Lord was deep. So deep, that David would do everything to know all that he could about the Lord. He knew that if there was an insight to know God, the things of God, and all that He had done, it was by treasuring the scriptures and hiding it in his heart. Hiding the scriptures does not mean that David was ashamed and didn’t want anyone to know. However, hiding the scriptures meant that he would hold each word of God in the depths of his heart. One of the greatest ways of “hiding” God’s word in our hearts is by memorizing the scriptures. Often times when we think of memorization we think of something unattainable or even boring. We parallel memorizing scripture to how we would memorize historical facts and events when we were in school. Hence, memorization would seem to be more “work” than it would be personal fulfillment. What if we were given five-hundred dollars for every verse memorized? Would this change our attitude? Any financial reward would be minimal compared to the accumulating value of God’s word deposited within our minds and our hearts. When scripture is stored in the mind and heart, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring to our attention when we most need it. Why is scripture memorization important? Because memorization strengthens our faith. Especially in our times of need. We will all experience times of testing, times of frustration, times of trial, and times when we seem to have no answers. It is then that the word of God comes alive! His promises to us become a healing balm when we read it. When the enemy attempts to cloud our thinking, His word that we have treasured in our hearts strengthens our faith, and weakens the enemies grip on us. Another reason why we memorize scripture, is for the purpose of witnessing and counseling. When we use God’s word to show proof to those that are lost, it gives value to the truth of Jesus and His forgiveness to those who call on His name for salvation. Also, when we use God’s word to help counsel others, it becomes the freedom that people need, and it gives them a foundation to stand upon during their troubled times. God’s word is a very present help in times of trouble! We must also recognize, that memorization stimulates meditation. In other words, when we memorize a verse, we can meditate on it anywhere, at any time, and at any place. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot give us this weapon if we have not stored it in our hearts and in our minds. When we read and

study God's Word, we must not only read it, but also apply it, live it, and memorize it. King David fell in love with every detail of God's word. When we desire to be filled by the Holy Spirit and His word, it is then that God is glorified. The goal of memorization is not to see how many verses we can memorize, but our goal is for the purpose of knowing God and living godly lives.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit gives you a desire to memorize scripture and to treasure it in your heart, so that you will not sin against the Lord.

Focus Challenge: Begin today to challenge yourself in memorizing scripture. You may want to start with one verse a week. As you keep growing and challenging yourself, you may want to memorize a verse a day!

Study Focus: Psalms 119; Colossians 3:2; Ephesians 6:17; Proverbs 22:17-19

DAY THIRTY

Scripture Focus: 1 Chronicles 16:23-25 “*Sing to the Lord, all the earth; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.* ²⁴ Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.

²⁵ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He also is to be feared above all gods.”

When we consider the word worship, by nature we connect it to praise and worship music. Yes, worship must be connected to singing praises to the Lord through song. However, worship is much more than just singing. Worship is a lifestyle! Everything we do, we do as unto the Lord, with an attitude and a heart of worship. When we serve, it should be with an attitude of worship. When we obey our parents, it should be with an attitude of worship. How we meet the needs of our spouse, should be with the attitude of worship. How we work as employees, should be done with an attitude of worship. How we meet the needs of others, should be met with an attitude of worship. How we talk, where we go, what we see, what we listen to, our motives, everything we do, eat or drink, we do to the glory of God the Father through the means of worship! There are times in our lives where worship is not front and center. Also at times, our worship can be in vain. The question that we must ask ourselves is, “how can we worship God without worshiping Him in vain”? Worship is focusing on responding to God. He has given of Himself to us, so in turn we are to give our worship back to Him! We must recognize all that the Lord has done for us. So in turn we give Him our honor, and our praise. It’s saying “thank you” for His goodness, grace and daily mercies. It’s a desire to bask in His presence and to honor Him with our lives. When we learn to practice the presence of God, we cannot help but to do what is right in His company. In Revelation 4:8, we are told that four creatures are around the throne worshiping day and night, without ceasing, saying “holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty...”. In the same chapter we read that twenty-four elders are around the throne of God on their faces, as they will say “worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power.” The word worship comes from the word “worth ship”. To worship the Lord is to give Him His proper worth, to magnify, glorify, honor, praise and serve. Another question we must ask ourselves is, “is our worship True worth ship? Does our worship describe the proper worth to the Lord? The more we focus on God, the more we will understand and appreciate how worthy He truly is. It Is when we grasp this reality and learn to appreciate Him, that we can’t help but to respond with praise. This is why He is worthy, because His glory evokes

immediate response! If we could actually see God at this very moment, we would understand how awesome and majestic He is. To the point that we would surely fall on our faces before Him, and tell Him how holy and worthy of praise He truly is!

Prayer Focus: If you have never prayed while on your face before the Lord, do so right now as you praise Him for who He is!

Focus Challenge: If worship is a lifestyle, write out some ways in your journal that you need to start worshiping the Lord better in (singing, serving, language, what you see, etc.).

Study Focus: Matthew 4:10; Psalms 95:6; Matthew 15:8-9; John 20:26-28; Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 5:12-13

DAY THIRTY-ONE

Scripture Focus: 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.⁵ *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”

There are two truths that are for certain: 1. We are in a spiritual battle. 2. As followers of Jesus, we won! There is a battle between light and darkness, which is spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is not necessarily the things that go “bump” in the night, it’s much deeper than that. It’s the battle of flesh verses spirit. It’s the fight to keep our eyes, hearts, thoughts and motives away from the Lord, and to be preoccupied by other things. Spiritual warfare is not a seasonal battle, it’s a daily battle. It’s a battle against the weapons of the enemy. The apostle Paul states in verse four that our weapons are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. The word “divinely” here means, “possessed by the God head, and/or belonging to the True God”. There are two things we must consider. First we must realize that the war is real. We will face spiritual battles every day. Whether in our actions, speech, attitudes, emotions, in public and in private, our battles are all too real. The question we must ask ourselves is, Will I truly serve the Lord today and allow Him to take control of every inch of my life? Or will I choose to listen to my flesh and in turn reap what comes with it? The second thing we must keep in mind is that the war is against the schemes of the devil. Any time we desire to connect with the Lord in a more intimate manner, there will always be opposition. The enemy is our hindrance. There are times when we desire to give the Lord our service and our attention, but the enemy is in the way. There are many ways he tries to oppose us in spiritual warfare. He tries through the means of accusation. The Bible calls him the accuser of the brethren. How does he accuse? He accuses you to God, he accuses God to you, he accuses you to others, he accuses others to you, and he will even accuse you to yourself. He will also use the battle of temptation. He is the tempter. If he attempted to tempt Jesus who had no sin, how much more will he tempt us, who were born in sin? Being tempted is not the sin, it is when we give into that temptation that we disobey the Lord. The devil will also use the battle of deception. As he did to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, he will also attempt to deceive us by trying to get us to believe his lie and

give in to his plan. It's NOT greener on the other side! However, the main thrust of spiritual warfare is the destruction of the life of such a one who would follow Jesus. Our marriages, relationships, homes and churches are on his radar. But our weapons are powerful and can destroy fortresses and any other thing that attempts to raise itself against our God!

Prayer Focus: Before you begin your day, pray that the Lord will destroy the thoughts of the flesh and bring you into fellowship with Him all day.

Focus Challenge: Today begin to create an atmosphere where the Lord is always welcomed. For example, worship in your car as you drive to your destination, worship at home, surround yourself with other believers that will keep you focused and strong. Do anything to stand firm!

Study Focus: 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; Revelation 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:10; John 11:10; Ephesians 6:10-12

DAY THIRTY-TWO

Scripture Focus: 1 Peter 5:8 “*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*”

Have you ever wondered what the conversation was like between Eve and Lucifer? As much as we would want to blame Eve for giving into the serpent’s scheme (and rightfully so), the deception must have been so strong that Eve and Adam fully engaged the lie! The devil is a deceiver, and unfortunately he’s pretty good at it. The Bible calls him a liar and the father of all lies. Anything he says, cannot be taken as truth. Deception is the name of his game. There are three primary objectives Satan uses to deceive. First, he deceives us concerning the true nature of sin. One thing is for certain, no one likes to be wrong, proved wrong, or admit they are wrong. This is the nature of sin. Satan is the same way; and because this is his nature, he desires us to follow his lead and do the same. When it comes to the nature of sin, no one truly desires to admit that they are wrong and in sin. This is why many of us won’t call it sin, instead we call it a shortcoming or a hang-up. When we recognize that our rebellion before the Lord is sin, it is then that the Holy Spirit brings forth conviction and in turn brings us to true repentance. Sin is not bigger than God! However, when we begin to believe that our sins are not as bad as we think they are, it is then that we fall for his deception! It’s sin that separates us from God. Satan’s desire is to always keep us separated from God, by deceiving us that our sins are not as bad as we think. Second, he deceives our emotions. If Satan is given access to our emotions and feelings, he will take advantage of it. There is a difference between having an emotion versus emotionalism. Emotion is any feeling of joy, sorrow, love, hate, etc. Emotionalism is an excessive appeal to emotions. Satan’s deception is to take our emotions and feelings and make it excessive. For example; **Fear**- he will debilitate our feelings and play with our minds. **Anger**- he will take a situation or a person and cause hateful feelings towards someone. Any kind of emotion we give him or allow him access to, he will take advantage of it and cause chaos. This is why our trust, faith and minds should always be on the Lord and in His word! His word is cleansing and brings peace. Finally, one of Satan’s greatest deceptions is making us believe we have plenty of time. He will make us believe we have plenty of time to get right with God, to get right with others, and to live a life of obedience to the Lord. Unfortunately, this deception is one of his greatest. The book of James says that we

are a mere vapor, we don't have time. Jesus also says that today is the day of our salvation. Let us not be deceived by the enemy today (or any day for that matter), but to trust in the Lord and know that what comes from Him is truth! A person is easily deceived if his emotions are not led by the Spirit of God or his mind focused on the word of God.

Prayer Focus: Pray that your mind and emotions will be focused today on the Lord and in His word. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been deceived by certain things in your life you may need to repent.

Focus Challenge: As we learned that one of Satan's greatest deceptions is making us believe we have plenty of time, write in your journal something that you have been impressed by the Holy Spirit to do but haven't because you thought you had time. Do it today!

Study Focus: Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:10; 1 John 1:9; James 4:14; Ephesians 5:16; John 9:4; Romans 13:11; 2 Corinthians 6:2

DAY THIRTY-THREE

Scripture Focus: 2 Samuel 23:8 “*These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite, chief of the captains, he was called Adino the Eznite, because of eight hundred slain by him at one time*”

In our culture today, if we claim to be a follower of Jesus, we have a “target” on our backs. The word “Christian”, unfortunately, is met with much resistance. Christianity, or being a Christian, is no longer seen through the lenses of respect as in times past. Today, society has categorized a follower of Jesus with those of a hyper right wing conservative agenda. They see Christians as haters, intolerant, not respectful of the rights of women, non-inclusive to other religions, and having an old-school mentality when it comes to the definition of marriage. Being a follower of Jesus is not for the weak. It takes someone with a genuine love and zeal for the Lord to stand strong in the midst of an ever changing culture. In 2 Samuel we read about King David and his mighty soldiers. There is one soldier that we read about that makes a huge impression. His name is Adino the Eznite. What made him a mighty man was two-fold; 1. He was a servant of God. 2. He knew how to handle the sword (he killed 800 men at one time)! In the same way, if we desire to be used mightily of God in the generation we live, being a servant and knowing how to handle our sword (Word of God) is of the utmost importance. Do you have a desire to be used mightily of the Lord? If so, consider three things that it will take if we desire to be used for His glory and His purpose.

- 1. We must develop a heart after Him.** Our eagerness to worship, hunger for His Word, zeal for prayer and our readiness to serve, should be the motive of our heart in wanting to be used mightily of the Lord. He must take first place in all we do. Scripture says that David was a man after the heart of God. Our love for the Lord is what empowers us to move forward without fear. It is love that casts out all fear!
- 2. We must live a life that will submit to His will.** Are you confident enough to choose God’s will at the expense of your dreams and desires? Being used mightily of the Lord often times brings us to a place where we are called to give up our life’s pursuits for His purpose. What are some things in your life that must be set aside so that you can give the Lord first place?
- 3. We must set our minds on His Word.** Being used mightily means to seek the scriptures mightily. King David and his men were men who sought the scriptures and desired to hold His word in their hearts. Knowing God’s Word makes us mighty! The Word is our sword. We may never slay eight hundred men in our lifetime, but when we learn how to use the sword, we can lead

eight hundred men to Jesus in our lifetime! Let us make it a point to desire to be used by the Lord and to be useful for His kingdom.

Prayer Focus: Pray the Lord give you a heart to serve others, to serve the Lord, and to honor His church. Pray the Lord use you in ways you would have never of imagined.

Focus Challenge: Write in your journal some areas in your life that you must give up in order to place the Lord as your priority.

Study Focus: John 14:12; Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:21

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

Scripture Focus: Hebrews 10:24-25 “*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*”

In life, there are good habits and bad habits. Good and bad habits in what we eat, how we talk, how act, where we go, or how we take care of our body. In the same way, our spiritual life can also have a series of good and bad habits. One of the worst habits we can have is “forsaking the assembling together”. Some may not see this as a bad habit. However, the author of Hebrews seems to put this bad habit front and center. Unfortunately, those who have, and who are, forsaking the communion and connection with the body of Christ, are missing out on the awesome benefits of what it means to be a biblically active member of the local church. Let’s make sure we clarify something: our attendance to church services or church related events is important. Is it important for numbers purposes? On the contrary! It’s important for our growth in Christ, for the purpose of encouraging one another, “and all the more as you see the day drawing near”. Let’s look at five benefits of being a biblically active church member.

- 1. It fulfills the need for unity.** We were created in the image of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The trinity alone shows us our created need for community and the connection. People don’t necessarily attend church to merely hear the word of God and to sing songs of praise, although these are legitimate reasons to attend. However, we attend our local congregations for the purpose of relationships. We were created to worship the Lord and we were created for each other. Romans 12 reminds us that we are many individuals, and have been united together as one body.
- 2. It encourages personal growth.** There have been too many horror stories of individuals who have stopped attending church for one reason or another, and have eventually left the Lord completely. This is why we need the body of Christ. We are to help each other in this walk we have in Christ. You and I were not created to walk alone. We are better together! If your growth in Christ is at the top of your list, then being an active member of the local church will be on the top of your list as well.
- 3. It protects us from heresy.** One major benefit that we have in being part of the church is the protection of following every wind and wave of doctrine that comes our way. When we biblically sharpen iron together, it keeps us from going off in a theological tangent.
- 4. It allows us to walk in our spiritual**

gifts. Every believer in Jesus has been given a spiritual gift. Unfortunately, many are not using them. If we are not present among the body, we can't bless the body! We were given spiritual gifts to edify the church. When we are not active in attendance, we steal and limit the body from its power because we are not together! We must use the gifts the Lord has given us to bless others. 5. **We are called to disciple others.** We were given the greatest command from Jesus Himself as He commanded us to make disciples. We are to be disciples, to raise disciples and to reproduce disciples. Being an active member allows us to do just that. When we set in our spirit that we were created to worship the Lord and were created to have communion with our brothers and sister in Christ, it is then that we can grasp the blessings and benefits of being part of the local church. Don't miss out...it's a bad habit!

Prayer Focus: If find yourself developing the bad habit of not attending church regularly, ask the Lord to forgive you and to rekindle your love for those He died for.

Focus Challenge: Make it your goal to make going to church your good habit and start attending again!

Study Focus: Hebrews 10:24-25; Proverbs 27:17; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:13-14a “¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth...”

Every believer must understand the serious nature of a spiritual battle. In the same way, we must also understand the importance of the armor of God. This armor is given by the Lord. When we consider David and his fight with Goliath, King Saul attempted to give David some armor to wear. However, David rejected this armor because he knew that his true “shield and deliverer” was the Lord! The armor of God will help us to stand and resist as the days are becoming more evil. Hence, the apostle Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus to take up the full armor of God and to do everything to stand firm! Have you ever wondered why we are capable of falling so quickly? Or capable of giving up so quickly? It’s in these moments that we have NOT done EVERYTHING it takes to stand. The apostle Paul uses the statement “stand firm” three times in this chapter. Why is this important? Because as long as we are in this flesh, our spirit and flesh will be in constant battle. Our spirit can be willing to walk as unto the Lord, but our flesh can be weak and cause us to fail in the process. How can we use the armor of the Lord to keep us from falling? Gird your loins with truth! The soldier’s belt is what kept his armor intact. Due to the fact that the soldiers were in constant hand-to-hand combat, they could not afford to wear loose clothing in a fight, since their enemy could use their loose clothing as an advantage. It is the belt of truth that keeps all the “loose articles” connected. Without truth, we become susceptible to every “wind and wave” that can take us to and fro. Paul encourages us to gird our loins with the belt of truth, because truth is our foundation, in doctrine, theology, biblical truth, and in the assurance of our salvation. The idea of this belt is to fight our spiritual battles sincerely and without hypocrisy, and not pretending to be something or someone that we are not. The belt of truth keeps us founded on truth and in truth, and not falling for the lies or trickery of the enemy. Everything that would hinder you from spiritual victory, must be strapped and held together by the belt of truth. Our loins, according to Webster’s Dictionary is defined as “*the parts of the body between the hips and the lower ribs, especially regarded as the seat a physical strength and generative power*” It is from the loins that we can stand, move, twist and turn. When we gird our loins with the belt of spiritual truth, it allows us to walk in power, to run from temptation and to stand strong in times of spiritual battle. We

are moved by God's truth and not by the enemy's lies. When we learn to gird our loins with God's truth, we are capable of standing and not quickly falling!

Prayer Focus: Pray that you find yourself constantly being girded by biblical truths. Also pray that you no longer fall for the lies of the enemy but to quickly put your trust in the promises of God.

Focus Challenge: Write in your journal about the areas in your life that have caused you to quickly fall. Share this with someone who can pray for you and keep you accountable. Remember, you are not alone in this battle.

Study Focus: Ephesians 6; James 4:7; 1 John 4:4; 1 Corinthians 15:57; John 8:32

DAY THIRTY-SIX

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:13-14 “¹³Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.”

In the days of Paul, a breast plate was usually a tough sleeveless piece of heavy leather or heavy material, with animal horn or hoof pieces sown to it; this was used to cover the soldier’s heart and other vital organs. Righteousness and holiness are such distinct characteristics of God. It is no wonder that the breastplate was of such importance, it covers the heart! The heart is the most vital organ in the human body. Without a strong heart or the beating of our heart, we can physically die. In the same sense, it is the heart that is the seat of our emotions, our feelings and our desires. The heart is the reflection of the real you. Therefore, in a spiritual battle, if the enemy has access to our hearts (emotions, feelings, desires, etc.), we can easily be defeated. The heart can be moved by emotion at times, but a protected heart will be moved by truth. If not protected, we can make dangerous and careless decisions through our emotions. We can also respond in ungodly and hurtful ways with an unprotected heart. If a soldier is moved by the wrong emotion, it can be fatal. There is a story of an American soldier in Afghanistan who was giving candy to kids in the street. One little boy came up to the soldier wanting candy. His sergeant yelled at the soldier to kill the boy. Not understanding the situation, the soldier hesitated. The sergeant yelled again to kill the boy. This time, without hesitation, the soldier did as the sergeant commanded and shot the boy dead. As they looked over at the dead child, they soon realized that he was strapped with two bombs underneath his clothes and was about to blow up the soldier and those around him. As ugly as this story is, the devil is the same way. He’s ruthless. He will place “feeling” in front of truth, and lies before reality. He will use your heart’s emotion to fall for his lies, to be affected by his accusations, to believe his temptations, to crumble at his intimidation, and to wave the flag of surrender at his discouragement. The breastplate of righteousness was given to us as one of our most important pieces of armor. It is this armor that covers the heart and emotion with righteousness! In our spiritual battle, we need to be reminded that we are God’s righteous children. Righteousness is the Greek word “Dikaiosune”, which means justified, justification. When we put on this piece of armor, it is a reminder that we are justified because of Jesus. We belong to Him and Him alone. Our

hearts belong to Jesus, and His truth is in us. The breastplate of righteousness covers us with promise. Therefore, it keeps our heart's emotion to believe in the lies of the enemy. Remember, if our emotions have been all over the place, it's time to put on the breastplate of righteousness to guard the most vital part of our body...the heart.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord will guard your heart and emotions. If your emotions have gotten the best of you, today, give it back to Christ.

Focus Challenge: Write in your journal about the areas that you have seen the enemy take control of your emotions, or areas that you have allowed him to control. Share this with someone who can pray for you and keep you accountable.

Study Focus: Jeremiah 17:9; Luke 21:34; Matthew 6:21; Proverbs 3:5-6; Proverbs 4:23; Proverbs 23:26

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:13-14 “¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace”

As athletes wear cleats to grip the ground they run on, Roman soldiers wore boots with nails in them. This was so that they could grip the ground during hand-to-hand combat and not slip. When the apostle Paul encourages us to shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, these shoes represent having peace of mind. In the heat of any spiritual battle, the greatest temptation the warrior faces, is to grow fearful and retreat. We must keep in mind that our foundation in a spiritual battle is the power of the gospel. For the gospel is the power of God unto salvation! It is in the peace of the gospel that we can stand firm and not slip away. The gospel of peace pertains to the good news, that through Christ Jesus, we can be at peace with God. God is on our side! To shod means to bind. We are to bind our feet with readiness. We must be ready to do what the Lord commands us to do, and to go where the Lord commands us to go. The analogy that immediately comes to mind is one of a track runner. Those who have ran track, are aware that there are different kinds of shoes for different kinds of races. If you are going to run the 100-meter sprint or the 400-meter relay, your shoes will be lighter in weight. However, if you are going to run cross country, your shoes will be light, but heavier on the inserts. This would allow you to run with more comfort and help avoid shin splints. In the same way, when we shod our feet with our “gospel shoes”, we must keep in mind that these shoes are both combat ready and slip resistant. Shodding our feet daily allows us to be battle ready as we walk away from evil, walk in the peace of God, and as we share the power of the gospel to those that need the gospel of peace! This part of the armor should always be on. We must keep in mind that the battle actually begins before our conflicts. We can't cram a battle like we do a test at school. Our preparation of standing strong on the word of God should happen before the conflict arises. When the battle is on, it's too late to prepare. We must shod our feet before and prepare beforehand. Why must we shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace? We as the church are commissioned to be sent out to proclaim the Good News of the gospel of Jesus. Proclaiming His death,

burial, resurrection and return, to a world that so desperately needs Him. Let's learn to prepare ourselves before the battle begins. Lace up!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Holy Spirit teaches us how to prepare ourselves with the readiness of the gospel of peace. Also pray that we allow the gospel to never grow old in our hearts, and remember that it is the very power that keeps us from slipping in times of spiritual combat.

Focus Challenge: Write in your journal about the areas in your life that you have been slipping in spiritually. Share this with someone who can pray for you and keep you accountable.

Study Focus: Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14; Romans 10:14-15; John 14:27

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:13-16 “¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, **taking up the shield of faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

When we consider one of the most dynamic pieces of armor, it's that of the shield. The shield that Paul is describing in the Greek, is referring to the large shield that would have protected the entire body (2.5 X 4.5 ft.). When Paul says to take up the shield of faith, he is saying to cover ourselves with the very substance that pleases God- faith! By taking up the shield of faith we are saying, “I believe God is my protector and God will see me through!” In our spiritual battle, why are we encouraged to take up the shield of faith? First, we are to take up the shield of faith for the purpose of extinguishing all the flaming arrows sent by the devil. Notice, we are able to not only extinguish some arrows, but we are empowered to extinguish all the flaming arrows! It is the shield of faith that extinguishes the arrows of temptation, doubt, discouragement, disappointment, disbelief, depression, fear, jealousy, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, etc. It is not a matter of “if” the devil fires them at us, it’s a matter of “when” he fires them at us. In a spiritual battle, the devil holds no punches when attacking the church. In turn, we are to be ready with our armor when resisting him when he does. The shield of faith is our full bodied protection from the enemy. It is our faith in the Lord and our trust in Him that keeps the enemy and his series of flaming arrows from making contact with us. When we have fully trusted in God’s promises, it has become our shield of faith. When we trust that the Lord is with us, it has become our shield of faith. When we have trusted that the Lord is more powerful than the battle we are in, it becomes our shield of faith. Our faith is what pleases God, and our faith is what shields us from the lies, attacks and doubts the enemy tries to send our way. It is of vital importance to make sure this article of protection is always with you and ready to be taken up. The enemy will launch his arrows even when we least expect it. It is behind the shield of faith however, that we can joyfully rest assured that what the devil attempts to send to us, is absolutely no match for the shield given to us! The apostle Paul says that the shield of faith is in “addition to all” the rest of the armor. This piece is crucial! It is in the heat of the battle that we

will get tested to see if we have the faith that our God is with us and that He will never leave us or forsake us. The enemy will throw an arrow to make us believe that the Lord is far away, when in reality, it is the Lord who is our shield of faith!

Prayer Focus: If there is an area of your life that has lacked faith, ask the Lord to help you to gain fresh faith in Him and His promises.

Focus Challenge: Write in your journal about areas that you need to gain fresh faith. Share this with someone who can pray over you and keep you accountable.

Study Focus: Proverbs 18:30; Proverbs 30:5-6; 1 John 5:4; Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 26:3; Hebrews 11:6

DAY THIRTY-NINE

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:13-17a “¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation...”

It is obvious to think that the helmet is for the protection of the head. However, we must recognize that the head is also the major target in every battle, both physically and mentally. If the heart is covered, his aim will be towards our head, which is our mind. If he can attack our minds, he can then have access to our emotion, faith and belief. It is in our minds that Satan can spew his greatest weapons of attack. There are four darts that the enemy will throw at your mind. **First**, is the dart of doubt. There is nothing more that the devil delights in than to get the believer to doubt God’s power, God’s presence, God’s promises and God’s plan. Doubting creates a snowball effect, it causes us to question His motive, His purpose, and causes us to lose trust in Him. Doubt can hinder our emotions, causing us to make emotional decisions and give emotional responses. When doubt sets in, then comes, **second**, disappointment. Our disappointments will be aimed at God, our church, our spiritual leaders, our pastor, or anyone else who has some form of spiritual authority. Doubt will undoubtedly unleash a series of disappointments that come our way, bringing us to completely distrust people. Therefore, we no longer trust our prayer life and no longer trust our spiritual life. When we no longer trust who we are spiritually, we stop associating with those who are spiritual.

Disappointment is an aim at the head! The **third** dart is that of discouragement. When discouragement sets in our minds, it will begin to break our will and our desire to ever serve the Lord again. The attack seems so strong that it breaks you. When discouragement sets in our minds, we start to believe that now everyone is to blame. We will stop praying, our worship will cease, or church attendance will stop, our Bible reading will come to a halt, and our desire for fellowship will be non-existent. The **fourth** dart is disbelief. This is where the enemy will deceive us into believing that God does not love us, or desire the best for us, even to the point of our complete disbelief in Him! If he can get us to this point, it is because we never put on the helmet of salvation. The helmet of salvation is used for exactly

what it is called, it is for the assurance of the believer's salvation in the heat of warfare. It is in the battle that we begin to question if God is even there or in our midst. It's in these moments that he will attempt to make us believe that we did something so bad that God no longer will forgive us or wants us as His own. When we put on the helmet of salvation, it keeps us in check and reminds us that we are saved, that we are children of God, and that we belong to the Lord. We must make sure that one of the first pieces of armor we put on is the helmet of salvation. The enemy desires to target our mind today. Even while you read this devotional, the battle is on. Crucify your mind, motive, conscious and subconscious. It is in the mind that our greatest battles begin. Take the helmet of salvation and put it on now!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord covers your mind and every thought that enters. If you have had some unholy and ungodly thoughts that have crept in, repent and allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse your mind.

Focus Challenge: Write in your journal about areas in your life where your mind has taken the best of you. Share this with someone so that they may pray for you and keep you accountable.

Study Focus: Romans 8:7; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16

DAY FORTY

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:13-17 “¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The writer of Hebrews likens the word of God to a sword when he says, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, an able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12). The first five articles of armor given are for the protection of the believer. However, this last article given is a weapon. If you notice, our weapon is not our fist, in the fact that our spiritual battle is not against flesh and blood. Our weapon is not our mouths, in the fact that we are capable of telling others what we think. However, our weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of the living God! Jesus himself showed us how to use the word of God during times of temptation. Jesus used three scriptures against the enemy during His time in the wilderness. In the same way, we were given the sword of the Spirit to resist the enemy! We use the sword of the Spirit as a defense (to fend off the enemy’s attacks) and as an offense (to destroy his strategies). When a soldier used a sword, he used it for close combat and not long ranged warfare. The sword was for hand-to-hand combat. As Christians we are to take of the sword and use it! This is the power of the word of God. In order to use the sword effectively, we must learn how to train with the sword. There are 3 ways we train using the word of God. **First**, we must learn to read it daily. As you have been faithful these past 40 days in reading this devotional, keep this momentum going for another 40 days, and then another 40 days, and so on. Our daily intake of the scripture keeps us focused, spiritually balanced, emotionally stable, mentally alert and inwardly focused. God’s word is truly a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. **Second**, we must learn to memorize the scriptures. In the midst of a spiritual battle, as the enemy launches his flaming arrows our way, scripture by memory are the heat sinking missiles we send his way! The father of lies does not stand a chance against the truth of God’s word. **Finally**, we must learn to use the sword of the Spirit to sharpen iron with

other soldiers. When the body of Christ comes together for Bible study and prayer, this becomes our moment of sharpening, encouraging, and growth. It is the pure milk of the scriptures that make us desire more, and it is the meat of God's word that satisfies our souls. In our spiritual battles, when the word of God is open, our King speaks. Let Him speak! For when He speaks, comes truth, power and conviction. We take up the sword of the Spirit not only for ourselves but for our families as well. Let's train our families to use God's word effectively and to read God's word daily. From Genesis to Revelation, there is power in the word of God. The Lord has given us every tool to win, if we're losing, it is because we are not suited up. Suit up! Grab your swords church! For we have the victory! Our God has won! Let us go into the battle together!

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord gives you a deeper desire and zeal for the word of God and that He gives you insights to His word.

Focus Challenge: Challenge yourself to read the scriptures daily and to memorize as many scriptures as you can throughout the rest of this year. Ask someone to keep you accountable as you two do this together (spouse, friend, brother, parent, child, etc.).

Study Focus: Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalms 119; James 1:22; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35; Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2;

EXTRA

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 6:18-19 “¹⁸ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, ¹⁹ and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel”

There is power in prayer. Even the apostle Paul was aware as to how powerful prayer truly is. In all of Paul’s letters, we see how extensive his prayer life was. Many of times we see how he would pray specifically for the church and the situations she found herself in. As Paul concludes Ephesians 6, and the describing of the armor of God, he made sure to insert the importance of prayer and petition. He encouraged us to pray at all times, to pray in the Spirit (meaning to focus in lining up with the things of God), to pray while being on the alert and perseverance and to pray for all the saints. If we can learn to pray daily in this way, we will than learn how to pray effectively and with purpose. Today, let us change the way we pray and become more effective in our communion with the Lord. Let us make our petitions to Him on our behalf and on behalf of the saints. Let us learn to make prayer our daily regimen for strong spiritual growth in the Lord.

Prayer Focus: Lord teach me how to pray.

Focus Challenge: Create a prayer journal as you write down your requests and write out answered prayers.

Study Focus: 1 John 5:14-15; 1 Chronicles 16:11; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Ephesians 1:18; Jeremiah 29:12; Matthew 5:44; Psalms 17:6; Philippians 4:6

